



# **Breaking The Silence On Hidden Violence**

**Addressing Hate Crime &  
Violence Against the LGBTQ  
Community in Waterloo Region**





## **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence: Addressing Hate Crime & Violence Against the LGBTQ Community in Waterloo Region**

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Cover Image

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Published by the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council.

September 2015.

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# Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence

## Addressing Hate Crime & Violence Against the LGBTQ Community in Waterloo Region

**“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”**  
~ Martin Luther King

For many individuals and families within the LGBTQ community, one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in Canada, victimization through violence, discrimination and systemic exclusion is a reality. Breaking the silence on this violence is first and foremost, about human rights. Specifically, it speaks to “...the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right to not be deprived thereof.” (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 7)

**“Recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and is in accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”**

~ Human Rights Code, Ontario

The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) sees violence as a symptom of a society that is out of balance. Violence is part of a continuum of discrimination and systemic exclusion. Wherever violence is allowed to exist,

the health and well-being of individuals and the community becomes eroded. Too often victims become silent about their experiences of victimization. This is particularly prevalent in populations that are marginalized and accustomed to not having their voices heard.

For this reason, the prevention of violence cannot focus on violence alone, but also needs to focus on the broader family, community and social dynamics in which violence happens.

For ideas and actions to lead to sustained, positive change they must:

- Include efforts at a system, community and individual level
- Challenge public policy
- Support those in leadership roles to counter oppression and marginalization
- Be grounded in a vision where everyone in the community feels included and their dignity is upheld

This sense of belonging is about moving beyond tolerance into acceptance. Belonging means the celebration of our differences as much as our similarities.

**Harvey Milk, American gay activist, was once asked by a younger gay man what he could do to help the movement and Harvey Milk said, "Go out and tell someone."**

**Violence hurts us all!** Silence about violence is the greatest barrier to inclusion and puts a great burden on communities. When it comes to violence, seeking to make our communities a place where **everyone** is safe and has a promising future is a very reasonable expectation.

When it comes to achieving this freedom from violence, each of us can be an ally and a champion of change by committing to:

- Give voice to those who may not have a voice
- Work to eliminate discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes
- Foster safety and belonging
- Amplify the voices of those who speak out against marginalization and oppression
- Look for meaningful consequences when someone has harmed another
- Ensure access to supportive resources
- Contribute to a broader vision of a community that is safe for all

In helping to break the silence, allies and champions share the vision that no one is harmed because of who they are.

**"I am a mother of a lesbian daughter and I worry every day about her and her girlfriend. They were actually accosted by an older woman in a grocery store who felt the need to make them feel inferior because they were holding hands and kissed each other in a display of affection."**

**~ Community Member**

## **Why this topic? Why now?**

Members of the LGBTQ community raised concerns regarding the alarming statistics on hate crimes against<sup>i</sup> individuals in the LGBTQ community<sup>ii</sup>. In response, the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) organized an open community dialogue on the issue. It is the mandate of the WRCPC to bring people together for dialogue on challenging topics to help to broaden awareness, to deepen understanding and to stimulate action.

The forum, **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence**, provided an opportunity for community members and agency stakeholders to look for opportunities for change.

Sadly, violence against LGBTQ individuals is not new in our community, our province or our country. Since 1986, Egale Canada Human Rights Trust has tirelessly championed equality, diversity, education, and justice for, and with, LGBTQ communities across our nation<sup>iii</sup>.

In 2006, the Ontario Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services published **Addressing Hate Crimes in Ontario**<sup>iv</sup> based on the work of a provincial Hate Crimes Working Group.

In 2011, over 150 individuals in Waterloo Region participated in a locally developed **Hate Crime Prevention & Training** initiative to better equip our community in identifying and responding to hate crimes and hate incidents.

Also in 2011, the **Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition** heard from the local LGBTQ community that addressing hate crime and violence must be a priority in Waterloo Region<sup>v</sup>.

In 2014, WRCPC researched and published a **fact sheet on hate crimes**<sup>vi</sup> that revealed some troubling statistics as they relate to hate crimes committed against individuals in our LGBTQ community.

With this reality as a backdrop, the forum **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence** was designed to raise awareness and draw attention to an issue that is still remarkably present and yet doesn't receive much public attention.

## Chronology of Events

### November 2014

- 75 people attend the forum **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence** a community dialogue on hate crime and violence at the Family Centre in Kitchener
- 38 people commit to working on next steps & finalizing the recommendations from the community dialogue
- Summary report is written & distributed to all participants

### February 2015

- Follow up meeting is held at the Family Centre to prioritize the recommendations
- Summary report identifies 3 key priorities and suggested strategies to begin the work, including establishment of a working group

### May 2015

- A small group meets and makes the decision to align the work of Breaking the Silence as a working group of the newly formed **Rainbow Community Council**

### June 2015

- A small working group drafts a Terms of Reference, expands the working group membership and determines immediate priorities

## What do we know?

In 2012, Statistics Canada reported that 13% of police-reported hate crimes were motivated by hatred of sexual orientation. Compared to other forms of hate crimes, incidents related to sexual orientation are:

- the most violent, with 67% classified as being violent offences
- the highest percentage of male victims (80%), and just over a half of the victims were youth (56% under the age of 25).

**“When it is dark out I worry about my safety as a trans woman because if I were to be sexually assaulted and the assailant were to find out I’m trans, I could be injured or killed.”**

**~ Community Member**

Recently the Canadian Mental Health Association reported that<sup>vii</sup> LGBTQ people experience:

- Higher rates of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders, suicidality and self-harm than their heterosexual peers
- Higher risk for problematic substance use than the general population with some research suggesting that the use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances may be two to four times higher among LGBTQ people than heterosexual people

- Double the risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than heterosexual people
- 77% of transgender respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide and 45% had attempted suicide; and those transgender youth who had experienced physical or sexual assault were found to be at greatest risk
- LGBTQ youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than their heterosexual peers
- LGBTQ youth are also overrepresented among the homeless population as PFLAG Canada reports that 26% of LGBTQ youth are told to leave home<sup>viii</sup>.

According to Toronto’s recent street needs assessment, **one in five homeless youth** in the city identify as LGBTQ. The report cautions that this number is not representative of the true number of homeless LGBTQ youth who often avoid the shelter systems which they see as homophobic and transphobic. Further, many youth are subject to homophobic bullying within schools and members of the LGBTQ community face barriers in accessing employment, health care, elder supports and other basic services or amenities that are often taken for granted by their non-queer peers.

These data show that LGBTQ people are disadvantaged in many social, economic, family and community areas when compared to the rest of the population and violence is directly related to that experience of disadvantage and exclusion.



## What happened at the Forum?

**“Today, I met a group who invited us to come as community, met us with dignity, listened, and made me believe they want to take action.”**

**“It’s so rare that I come away from discussions where a community is invited to present to a council or group and I feel good about it.”**

**“As an activist, it becomes a mantra: it will get better. It will change. We can make it happen. Now I do believe there’s a community there”**

~ Forum Participant

In November 2014, members of the LGBTQ community, together with WRPCPC members and Friends of Crime Prevention, facilitated a community dialogue, **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence**, to:

- Discuss why violence against the LGBTQ community, and specifically for transgender people, is an important issue for all people in Waterloo Region
- Explore possible opportunities to address this concern
- Vision next steps to support collaborative action

The **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence** forum was organized into three parts:

- 1. Keynote address** by Helen Kennedy, Executive Director, Egale Canada Human Rights Trust
- 2. Panel discussion** with a question and answer period specific to four identified areas of concern:
  - **Youth:** Spencer Small, Therapeutic Counsellor, OK2BME Program – KW Counselling
  - **Older Adults:** Jim Parrott, President & Executive Director, Spectrum – A Rainbow Community Space
  - **Transgender/Gender Variant Individuals:** D Morton, Member, Gender Variant Working Group
  - **LGBTQ Refugees Seeking Asylum in Waterloo Region:** Keghani Mardikian, Clinical Counsellor, Carizon
- 3. Facilitated table discussions** and full group plenary

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”**

~ Margaret Mead



## What we heard during the community dialogue

**“It’s a no-brainer, everyone deserves equity and equality.”**

There was consensus among participants that, while **everyone is entitled to equity, freedom from discrimination, and psychological and physical safety** this is not the reality for specific segments of the population in our community and beyond. Members of the LGBTQ community are at a **heightened degree of vulnerability** and live in an environment where being oneself and ‘out’ means they are a target and **subject to marginalization, oppression, discrimination and violence**.

Consequently, many people **suffer in silence** because there are few safe spaces that honour and celebrate diversity and allow people to fully express their identity.

Participants noted that the marginalization, oppression, discrimination and violence against members of the LGBTQ community represent a **fundamental human rights issue** that inhibits individuals from reaching their full potential. Sadly, this victimization is often hidden due to the **fear of speaking out and reporting** because of stigma, forced outing, re-victimization and systemic discrimination. **Myths, stereotypes and prejudice** were also reported to be widespread at the community level, leading to discrimination and violence.

LGBTQ people not only experience victimization from outside the queer community, but are also subject to **oppression and disempowerment** from

within the queer community. Further, the interplay between sexual orientation, gender identity, race, residency status and class, may further increase a person’s degree of vulnerability, **limit their access to a support network or decrease the likelihood that they will seek help**.

The marginalization, oppression, discrimination and violence experienced at the community level by members of the LGBTQ community are amplified by **victimization experienced at a system and institutional level**. It was noted that ‘systems are slow to evolve’ and that a **culture of ignorance and complacency** exists where many people do not acknowledge the challenges and barriers faced by members of the LGBTQ community. Additionally, the dominant discourse of ‘**presumed heterosexuality**’ influences how systems and institutions are designed and operated. All of these dynamics have resulted in a **lack of commitment to action and change**.

**Ignorance among people in power** was also noted as a major contributing factor that implies to the community that this discrimination is ‘OK’ and that denying equity for members of the LGBTQ community **is acceptable**. Any lack of accountability at the systems level **perpetuates the status quo**.

At subsequent follow up events, the community identified the following top priorities for immediate next steps:

- Promote safety
- Build alliances
- Enhance community collaboration
- Provide public education
- Show strong leadership



To be accomplished via:

- Supporting existing LGBTQ friendly structures
- Collaboration and resource sharing
- Securing funding for LGBTQ engagement efforts
- Training about belonging and inclusion and how to be an ally for the LGBTQ community
- Taking active steps to create safe spaces for further action and dialogue

To this end, participants formed a **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence Working Group** and decided to align it structurally with the newly formed **Rainbow Community Council**<sup>ix</sup>.

“One sees a disproportionately small number of same-sex couples walking hand-in-hand in Waterloo Region. If this is a safe and inclusive community, why is this so?”

~ Community Member

## Call to Action

When it comes to violence, challenging the status quo is critically important. Some might think that because the goal of complete safety for everyone seems unattainable it is reasonable for some people in our community to be or feel unsafe. If that’s the case, then it is time to be unreasonable.

Any shift in the status quo will be the result of allies and champions actively working for change at the systems level (policy, legislation), community level, and person to person interactions.

## Systems Level

Mechanisms need to be established to hold systems accountable for their actions or inactions in closing the gap between rhetoric, policy and practice.

At the systems level, allies and champions need to:

- Work together to close the gap between rhetoric and actual practice and facilitate true institutional and organizational **culture change**, going beyond just ‘good enough’
- Identify and **challenge complacency**
- Forge **deliberate partnerships** for interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange. These partnerships need to shift services from being reactive to focusing on prevention and early intervention

## Community Level

By creating spaces for open and safe dialogue, we put a human face to the issue of violence, we counter myths, stereotypes, and prejudice and support the unlearning of basic assumptions, promote understanding, and awareness of where injustices have become normalized.

At the community level, allies and champions need to:

- Uphold fundamental human rights and collectively illuminate injustice
- Take an assertive stance to counter the bystander effect
- Confront fear and ignorance with education and awareness and ensure that the voice of acceptance is louder than the voice of intolerance

- Actively involve members of the LGBTQ community in these efforts and honour their voice

Within the LGBTQ community, specific work is also needed to:

- Promote unity within, promote safety and better support members of the community in speaking out. Fear immobilizes and further makes the issue of violence against the LGBTQ invisible.

## Individual Level

Ways that individuals can take action for **Breaking the Silence on Hidden Violence**:

- Share this document with 5 people
- Share this document through social media
- Present this document to your Board, Municipal Council, faith community, or school
- Consider endorsing this document as a way of making a commitment to change
- Join the Rainbow Community Council (<http://yourwrrc.ca/rainbow-community-council/>)
- Examine & review your organization's policies regarding LGBTQ inclusion. Engage a member of the LGBTQ community to assist.
- Participate in a LGBTQ hosted event
- Learn about inclusive language and learn how and when to use the terms
- Commit to asking questions when you don't know and challenge your own assumptions

- Practice how to stand up to homophobic comments made by colleagues, friends or family

- Join the Breaking the Silence Working Group

- Check whether your child's recreation and social programs allow trans children or youth to participate according to their preferred gender

- Provide at least one gender neutral bathroom at your workplace

- Consider sharing this document with your MP or MPP, asking what commitments they are prepared to make to prevent hate crime and violence in our community

- Become informed about LGBTQ realities

- Let it be known that you are an ally and be a model for others

- Become a member of an ally network. Visit [LGBT Allies<sup>x</sup>](#) for more on becoming an ally.

Tell us at [wrcpc@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:wrcpc@regionofwaterloo.ca) what you plan to do or have done so we can celebrate our community change towards a place that is safe for all people.

## Let's Get to Work

Everyone is entitled to equity and safety. Moving toward greater equality and freedom from violence is dependent on allies and champions who lend their voices to counter injustice and honour the fundamental rights of all people. Change happens when we all take practical and substantive steps towards community transformation.

## References

i Hate crimes can be divided into two categories, **hate incidents** and **hate crimes**: **Hate incidents** are expressions of bias, prejudice and bigotry that are carried out by individuals, groups, organizations and states, directed against stigmatized and marginalized groups or communities, and intended to affirm and secure existing structures of domination and subordination. **Hate crimes** are hate incidents that are also criminal offences committed against a person or property and motivated, in whole or in part, by bias or prejudice based on real or perceived race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, gender, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or any other similar factor.

Report of the Hate Crimes Community Working Group to the Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (2006) Pp. 18-19. Available at: [http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/hatecrimes/HCCWG\\_full.pdf](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/hatecrimes/HCCWG_full.pdf)

ii Hate Crime: RAP Sheet (2014). Available at [http://preventingcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/RapSheet\\_HateCrimes0714v9.pdf](http://preventingcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/RapSheet_HateCrimes0714v9.pdf)

iii Egale Canada Human Rights Trust <http://egale.ca/>

iv Addressing Hate Crimes in Ontario (2006). Available at [http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/hatecrimes/HCCWG\\_full.pdf](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/hatecrimes/HCCWG_full.pdf)

v WRRC Community Conversations: Final Report (2011). Available at: <http://yourwrrc.ca/wp-wrrcstuff/uploads/2013/11/WRRC-Final-Report-Jan-2011.pdf>

vi Hate Crime: RAP Sheet (2014). Available at [http://preventingcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/RapSheet\\_HateCrimes0714v9.pdf](http://preventingcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/RapSheet_HateCrimes0714v9.pdf)

vii Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans People and Mental Health. Available at: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-people-and-mental-health/>

viii Visit [www.pflagcanada.ca](http://www.pflagcanada.ca)

ix **The Rainbow Community Council (RCC)** is an initiative of the WRRC designed to bring together existing community organizations (allied with the Rainbow community) to develop a truly community-wide, sustainable framework for supporting the Rainbow community as a whole. Member organisations in the RCC work collaboratively to support each other in such ways as addressing gaps in service provision; avoiding duplication of services and resources; collaborating on grants/proposals; and other supportive and collaborative initiatives as they relate to the Rainbow community in Waterloo Region.

x Allies Show Their Colours brochure: <http://www.homophobic.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/5843-DEP-EN-15.pdf>

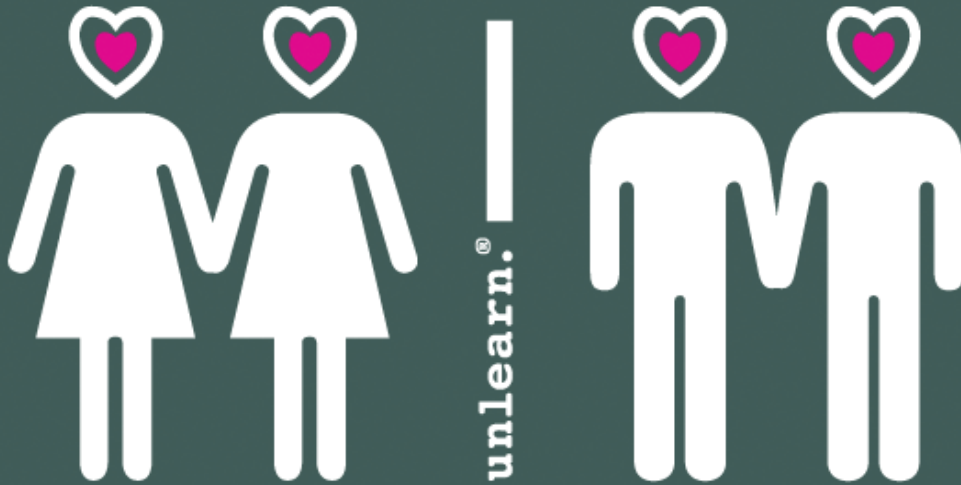


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